
**BEARING THE BURDEN
WORKLOAD IMBALANCE AND HIERARCHICAL PRESSURE
AMONG FACULTY MEMBERS IN PRIVATE AYUSH COLLEGES IN
INDIA**

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ABSTRACT

The rapid proliferation of private AYUSH (Ayurveda, Yoga & Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy) colleges across India has introduced significant structural and interpersonal challenges within academic departments. Among the most concerning yet underexamined of these challenges is the unequal distribution of teaching, administrative, and departmental workloads between senior and junior faculty members. This article critically examines the phenomenon of workload imbalance in private AYUSH institutions, with particular attention to the practice whereby senior faculty members systematically delegate disproportionate responsibilities to their junior colleagues while legitimizing such behaviour through a normative appeal to their own past experiences - a rationale commonly articulated as: "I did the same when I was junior." Drawing on frameworks from organizational behaviour, higher education management, academic labour studies, and professional ethics, the article explores the structural conditions that enable and perpetuate such hierarchical imbalances. It further examines the multi-dimensional consequences of this practice, including the erosion of junior faculty morale and professional development, diminished institutional productivity, compromised academic quality, and the entrenchment of exploitative workplace cultures. The

article argues that workload imbalance in AYUSH institutions is not merely an administrative inefficiency but an ethically fraught practice that demands urgent policy attention, transparent governance reform, and a reorientation of institutional cultures toward equity, mentorship, and shared academic responsibility.

KEYWORDS: Ayush colleges; workload imbalance; junior faculty; hierarchical pressure; academic labour; organizational culture; higher education ethics; India.

1. INTRODUCTION

India's higher education system has expanded dramatically over the past two decades and nowhere is this growth more visible than in the AYUSH sector. With the central government's active push to institutionalize traditional medicine systems and hundreds of private colleges emerging to meet growing student demand, the AYUSH academic landscape today accommodates hundreds of thousands of students across undergraduate, postgraduate, and doctoral programs ^[1]. However, behind this impressive quantitative expansion lies a set of qualitative concerns that have received comparatively little scholarly attention: the working conditions of faculty members, particularly those at the entry and mid-career levels.

In private AYUSH institutions, faculty members occupy a uniquely precarious position. Unlike central or state universities where faculty appointments are governed by the University Grants Commission (UGC) regulations, many private colleges operate with minimal regulatory oversight and considerable managerial discretion ^[2]. This environment creates fertile ground for informal hierarchies and power asymmetries that often manifest in the unequal distribution of academic workloads. Senior faculty members - those who hold positions such as professor, head of department, or dean - frequently transfer a substantial portion of their teaching duties, examination responsibilities, departmental paperwork, and committee work onto the shoulders of assistant professors or lecturers who are early in their careers and therefore least positioned to resist such demands ^[3].

What makes this practice particularly complex is the cultural and psychological framing through which it is often justified. Rather than acknowledging such delegation as an institutional failure or an ethical lapse, senior faculty frequently invoke a personal narrative of having themselves endured similar hardships during their own junior years ^[4]. This appeal to historical suffering - what might be described as a "cycle of normalized exploitation" - functions simultaneously as moral justification and social pressure, subtly communicating to junior colleagues that acceptance of heavy workloads is both expected and ennobling.

This article contends that such justifications, however sincerely held, are ethically insufficient and structurally harmful. The experiences of one generation cannot automatically confer legitimacy on the experiences of the next. Moreover, the context of AYUSH education in the 21st century - characterized by accreditation demands, research publication expectations, digital administrative requirements, and intensifying student needs - renders the burdens placed on junior faculty qualitatively different from those faced by earlier academic generations. Against this backdrop, this article undertakes a systematic examination of the causes, characteristics, and consequences of workload imbalance in private AYUSH colleges, and calls for institutional and policy-level interventions to address it.

2. Contextual Background: The Ayush Academic Sector in India

The AYUSH system represents one of India's most distinctive contributions to global health and knowledge traditions. Encompassing Ayurveda, Yoga and Naturopathy, Unani, Siddha, and Homeopathy, these systems have been formally integrated into the national healthcare infrastructure and are governed by statutory bodies such as the National Commission for Indian System of Medicine (NCISM) and the National Commission of Homeopathy (NCH) ^[5]. Over the past decade, the Ministry of AYUSH has actively promoted the expansion of AYUSH education through the establishment of new colleges, the revision of curricula, and the integration of AYUSH services into the national health mission.

Despite this institutional recognition, private AYUSH colleges - which constitute most AYUSH teaching institutions - often function with limited resources, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient faculty strength ^[6]. Many such institutions maintain faculty rosters that are barely adequate to meet the minimum requirements set by regulatory bodies, resulting in a situation where the actual teaching and administrative burden is chronically heavier than it should be per faculty member. In such an environment, workload distribution becomes not simply a matter of academic culture but also one of institutional survival and compliance management.

Compounding this structural scarcity is the fact that career advancement in AYUSH colleges remains highly dependent on seniority and informal patronage relationships ^[7]. Junior faculty members frequently rely on senior colleagues not only for professional guidance but also for support in securing promotions, research opportunities, and favourable evaluations. This dependency dynamic significantly reduces the agency of junior faculty to contest or renegotiate unfair workload arrangements, even when such arrangements are detrimental to their well-being and professional growth.

3. Mechanisms of Workload Delegation in Hierarchical Academic Settings

Workload imbalance in academic institutions rarely emerges overnight. Rather, it develops gradually through a set of overlapping mechanisms that normalize and entrench unequal labour distributions over time. In the context of AYUSH colleges, at least four distinct mechanisms appear to operate concurrently.

3.1 Informal Role Expansion

Junior faculty members are frequently asked to take on responsibilities that formally belong to senior staff. These include managing departmental examinations, preparing academic records and reports, attending to students' day-to-day academic concerns, and organizing departmental events and seminars. While some degree of role flexibility is expected and even healthy in academic environments, the systematic assignment of time-intensive responsibilities to junior colleagues - without corresponding recognition, compensation, or workload credit - constitutes informal role expansion that disadvantages newer faculty members [8].

3.2 Differential Teaching Load Allocation

One of the most direct expressions of workload imbalance is the unequal distribution of teaching hours. In many private AYUSH colleges, senior faculty members teach fewer contact hours per week, sometimes offering only postgraduate or specialty classes that require less routine effort, while junior faculty carry the weight of undergraduate lecture series, practical sessions, and clinical demonstrations [9]. Research on faculty workload in South Asian higher education institutions has consistently found that teaching hours are distributed along seniority lines rather than in accordance with formal policies or pedagogical rationale [10]. This structural pattern leaves junior faculty with limited time for research, professional development, or recovery from occupational fatigue.

3.3 Administrative Burden Transfer

Administrative tasks in AYUSH colleges include maintaining student attendance registers, filing accreditation documentation, coordinating with affiliated universities, organizing departmental meetings, and managing inventory for laboratories and clinical departments. These tasks are often tedious, time-consuming, and unglamorous - yet they are essential to institutional functioning. Senior faculty who occupies formal leadership roles such as head of department or program coordinator frequently delegate these responsibilities entirely to junior colleagues, retaining only the prestige of the position without its associated labour [11]. This form of upward-flowing prestige and downward-flowing burden is a well-documented pattern

in hierarchical organizations and has been described in organizational theory as "prestige-labour dissociation" [12].

3.4 Research and Publication Exploitation

In institutions where research output is a metric for departmental prestige or institutional ranking, junior faculty sometimes find themselves performing the bulk of research labour - conducting literature reviews, gathering clinical data, writing manuscripts - while senior colleagues appear as first or corresponding authors based on positional authority rather than intellectual contribution [13]. This practice, which in research ethics circles is referred to as "honorary authorship" or "guest authorship," violates established norms of research integrity and deprives junior faculty of the professional credit that would otherwise advance their careers [14]. For AYUSH institutions aspiring to greater academic recognition, such practices represent not only an ethical problem but also a long-term threat to research credibility.

4. The "I Did It Too" Justification: Cultural Legitimization of Inequity

Perhaps the most psychologically complex dimension of the workload imbalance problem in AYUSH colleges is the cultural narrative that senior faculty use to justify it. The claim that "I also went through this when I was junior" serves multiple rhetorical functions simultaneously: it frames current exploitation as historical precedent, invokes a shared experience of hardship to generate compliance, and implicitly communicates that survival of the ordeal is a prerequisite for professional legitimacy [15].

This logic draws on what sociologists describe as "normalized suffering" within institutions - the tendency for members of a group who have endured hardship to reproduce those conditions for successive members, not necessarily out of malice but as an expression of a cultural grammar in which suffering is understood to be productive or character-forming [16]. In medical and paramedical education more broadly, this pattern is well-documented. Studies of medical residency programs have found that physician supervisors frequently resist reforms to reduce resident working hours on the grounds that long hours were formative to their own professional development, even in the face of evidence demonstrating harm to residents and patients alike [17].

Applying this analysis to the AYUSH college context, it becomes apparent that the "I did it too" justification reflects not only individual attitudes but a deeper institutional culture that equates endurance of hardship with professional maturation. Junior faculty are implicitly expected to accept workload imbalance not as an unfortunate feature of their current employment but as an initiatory experience that will eventually position them to benefit - and

to pass on similar burdens to the next generation. This cyclical logic, however, offers no mechanism for improvement; it simply reproduces inequality at each generational turnover. From an ethical standpoint, it is important to recognize that the experiences of earlier generations of faculty occurred under different institutional, regulatory, and professional conditions. The AYUSH academic environment of two or three decades ago did not carry the same accreditation pressures, research publication requirements, digital administrative demands, and student-centered service expectations that characterize contemporary institutions [18]. The hardships endured by senior faculty, while real, are not therefore equivalent to those faced by today's junior faculty members - and even if they were equivalent, the experience of past wrongdoing does not justify its perpetuation.

5. Impact on Junior Faculty: Development, Satisfaction, and Well-Being

The consequences of workload imbalance for junior faculty members are wide-ranging and, in many cases, deeply damaging. Research in academic labour and higher education psychology consistently identifies workload inequity as one of the most significant predictors of job dissatisfaction, burnout, and early career attrition among faculty [19].

5.1 Constraints on Professional Development

For junior faculty in any academic discipline, the early years of a career are critical for establishing a research identity, building a publication record, developing pedagogical expertise, and cultivating professional networks. When most of the available time and cognitive energy is consumed by teaching loads that exceed reasonable limits, administrative drudgery, and institutional compliance tasks, junior faculty are effectively foreclosed from engaging in the activities that would advance their long-term careers [20]. In the AYUSH sector, where research output is increasingly being linked to institutional accreditation and individual performance evaluations, this foreclosure has compounding consequences: junior faculty who cannot produce research are disadvantaged in promotion processes, grant applications, and lateral career mobility.

5.2 Psychological Stress and Burnout

Occupational burnout - characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a reduced sense of personal accomplishment - has been extensively documented among academic professionals who experience chronic workload stress [21]. The conditions present in many private AYUSH colleges, including high teaching contact hours, unpaid administrative labour, limited institutional support, and workplace hierarchies that discourage grievance expression, constitute a near-perfect environment for the development of burnout. Studies

examining faculty well-being in Indian higher education institutions have found that younger faculty members experience significantly higher levels of psychological distress compared to their senior counterparts, with workload inequity identified as a primary contributing factor [22]. Burnout, in turn, reduces the quality of student-faculty interactions, diminishes teaching effectiveness, and ultimately harms students - who are the institution's primary stakeholders.

5.3 Erosion of Autonomy and Agency

Faculty autonomy - the sense that one has meaningful control over one's teaching, research, and professional identity - is widely recognized in higher education literature as a fundamental predictor of academic engagement and satisfaction [23]. When junior faculty are required to fulfil workloads assigned entirely by senior colleagues, with little opportunity to choose their courses, design their schedules, or pursue their own pedagogical and research interests, their professional autonomy is effectively diminished. Over time, this erosion of autonomy can produce what organizational psychologists describe as "learned helplessness" - a condition in which individuals cease to initiate independent action because they have internalized the belief that their efforts will have no effect on their circumstances [24]. Faculty members who develop learned helplessness become passive, disengaged, and ultimately less effective contributors to institutional life.

5.4 Faculty Retention and Institutional Brain Drain

Private AYUSH colleges already face significant challenges in attracting and retaining qualified faculty, partly due to lower compensation compared to allopathic medical institutions and partly due to limited career advancement pathways. When this structural disadvantage is compounded by an institutional culture of workload exploitation, the predictable result is elevated attrition among junior faculty who possess the qualifications, ambition, and alternatives necessary to seek employment elsewhere [25]. The loss of capable junior faculty represents a direct threat to institutional continuity, academic quality, and the long-term sustainability of AYUSH education as a credible academic enterprise.

6. Institutional and Academic Productivity Implications

Beyond the consequences for individual faculty members, workload imbalance carries significant implications for the academic productivity and institutional effectiveness of AYUSH colleges as organizations. Higher education institutions derive their academic value - and their reputational capital - primarily from the intellectual output and pedagogical quality of their faculty as a collective. When workload distribution is systematically inequitable, the collective capacity of the faculty is compromised in several ways.

First, overloaded junior faculty are less likely to produce high-quality teaching. The relationship between excessive workload and instructional quality is well-established: faculty who are stretched thin across multiple responsibilities engage in more superficial lesson preparation, provide less individualized student feedback, and are less likely to incorporate innovative pedagogical approaches ^[26]. In AYUSH colleges, where clinical education requires careful mentorship, hands-on instruction, and individualized attention to student competencies, these diminutions in teaching quality have direct implications for graduate preparedness and patient safety.

Second, institutions in which senior faculty are disengaged from core teaching responsibilities risk losing coherent curricular vision. Undergraduate programs in AYUSH disciplines require integrated teaching approaches in which senior faculty expertise is brought to bear on the transmission of complex traditional knowledge systems. When senior faculty disengage from undergraduate teaching, students lose access to the most experienced educators at precisely the moments when foundational understanding is being established ^[27].

Third, the intellectual culture of a department is shaped by the behaviour and attitudes of its senior members. When senior faculty model disengagement, delegate their obligations, and prioritize their own convenience over institutional contribution, they communicate to the entire departmental community - including students - that such behaviours are acceptable expressions of professional success ^[28]. This modelling effect has long-term cultural consequences that outlast any individual faculty member's tenure and are difficult to reverse once entrenched.

7. Ethical Dimensions: Power, Fairness, and Professional Obligation

The ethical analysis of workload imbalance in AYUSH colleges must engage with three primary dimensions: the ethics of power and its responsible exercise, principles of distributive justice in institutional settings, and the professional obligations that academic positions entail.

Senior faculty members in AYUSH colleges hold power in multiple senses: formal authority derived from rank and administrative position, informal influence over career advancement and departmental culture, and epistemic authority arising from their greater experience and knowledge. Ethical theories of power - from Aristotle's virtue ethics to contemporary relational ethics frameworks - consistently hold that the possession of power entails obligations toward those over whom it is exercised ^[29]. In the academic context, this means that senior faculty bear a particular responsibility for the well-being, development, and fair

treatment of those who work under their guidance. Exploiting the structural vulnerability of junior colleagues for personal convenience is a straightforward violation of this relational ethical obligation.

From the standpoint of distributive justice, the systematic allocation of disproportionate workloads to junior faculty members violates basic principles of fairness that should govern labour distribution in institutional settings. John Rawls' influential theory of justice, for instance, holds that institutional arrangements are just only if they benefit even the least advantaged participants in the system ^[30]. Workload arrangements that systematically disadvantage junior faculty - while conferring unearned ease on senior colleagues - fail this test decisively. Moreover, because the junior faculty of today are the senior faculty of tomorrow, such arrangements perpetuate an unjust cycle that fails each successive generation. Professional ethics frameworks for academic practitioners, including those articulated by bodies such as the UGC and various professional associations in the AYUSH sector, explicitly include obligations of collegiality, fair treatment of colleagues, and honest fulfilment of assigned responsibilities ^[31]. Senior faculty who delegates the substantive content of their roles to junior colleagues while retaining formal position and associated privileges are arguably in violation of these professional standards - whether existing institutional mechanisms exist to enforce accountability.

8. Governance and Regulatory Dimensions: Gaps and Opportunities

The persistence of workload imbalance in private AYUSH colleges reflects not only cultural and ethical failures but also structural gaps in governance and regulatory frameworks. An effective response to this problem requires attention at multiple levels of the educational system.

At the institutional level, most private AYUSH colleges lack transparent, formally documented workload allocation policies. In the absence of clear guidelines specifying the expected teaching contact hours, administrative responsibilities, and research contributions of faculty at each rank, workload distribution is left entirely to the discretion of heads of department and institutional managers - creating an environment in which informal power dynamics fill the vacuum left by absent policy ^[32]. Developing and enforcing transparent workload frameworks is therefore a foundational governance reform that AYUSH institutions should prioritize.

At the regulatory level, bodies such as the CCIM and CCH prescribe minimum faculty-student ratios and basic qualifications but provide limited guidance on workload equity or the

conditions of faculty employment. A strengthened regulatory framework that includes auditable workload standards, grievance mechanisms for faculty, and periodic institutional reviews of workload distribution would significantly reduce the space within which exploitative practices can flourish ^[33]. Comparative examples from international higher education governance - such as the structured workload models used in Australian and United Kingdom universities - demonstrate that transparent, externally audited workload frameworks can successfully reduce inequity without compromising institutional flexibility ^[34].

At the policy level, the Ministry of AYUSH and the Ministry of Education have an opportunity to articulate a clearer vision for the working conditions of AYUSH faculty as part of their broader mandate to improve educational quality. Policies that protect junior faculty from exploitation, incentivize mentorship over delegation, and create accountability mechanisms for senior faculty would represent meaningful progress toward a more equitable AYUSH academic sector.

9. Toward a culture of equitable mentorship and shared academic responsibility

Ultimately, addressing workload imbalance in AYUSH colleges requires more than regulatory reform; it requires a cultural transformation in how seniority, mentorship, and collective academic responsibility are understood and practiced within these institutions. The relationship between senior and junior faculty should be characterized by genuine mentorship, not exploitative delegation.

Genuine academic mentorship involves senior faculty sharing their knowledge, experience, and professional networks with junior colleagues; modelling engaged, high-quality teaching and scholarship; providing constructive guidance on curriculum development, research design, and publication; and advocating within institutional structures for the professional interests of those they mentor ^[35]. This model of seniority - one defined by contribution rather than entitled ease - is fundamentally different from the model that currently operates in many private AYUSH colleges, and its cultivation would benefit not only junior faculty but also students, institutions, and the AYUSH academic tradition.

Research on high-performing academic departments consistently finds that cultures of shared responsibility, mutual respect, and collaborative knowledge-building are associated with superior teaching quality, greater research productivity, lower faculty turnover, and stronger student outcomes ^[36]. These findings suggest that the investment required to transform institutional cultures toward equity and mentorship - while genuine - is offset by substantial gains in academic effectiveness and organizational sustainability.

Practically, this cultural transformation might begin with structured faculty development programs that explicitly address workload ethics, introduce senior faculty to evidence-based mentorship practices, and create spaces for honest departmental dialogue about workload distribution. Peer review processes that include workload equity as an evaluative criterion, alongside traditional measures of teaching and research performance, could help institutionalize these values. Student feedback mechanisms, appropriately designed to capture the quality and availability of teaching at all faculty levels, can also serve as indirect accountability tools [37].

10. CONCLUSION

The issue of workload imbalance and hierarchical pressure in private AYUSH colleges is, at its core, a question of institutional justice. The practice of delegating disproportionate teaching, administrative, and research labour to junior faculty members - sustained and legitimized by appeals to generational precedent - is not a harmless feature of academic life, nor is it a necessary stage of professional development. It is a structural and ethical problem with documented consequences for faculty well-being, teaching quality, institutional productivity, and the overall health of AYUSH education as an academic enterprise.

The fact that senior faculty may have themselves endured similar conditions is poignant but not exculpatory. History's wrongs do not become rights by virtue of their repetition. What is required, instead, is a conscious and collective decision to interrupt the cycle - to recognize that the measure of a senior academic's contribution lies not in how much they have offloaded onto others, but in how meaningfully they have invested in the development of those who come after them.

This article has sought to map the terrain of workload imbalance in private AYUSH colleges, to analyse the mechanisms and justifications that sustain it, and to articulate the costs it imposes across multiple dimensions of academic life. It has also pointed toward a set of governance, regulatory, and cultural interventions that, taken together, could meaningfully transform the conditions under which junior faculty in these institutions work. The realization of a more equitable AYUSH academic sector will require sustained commitment from institutional leaders, regulatory bodies, policymakers, and faculty members at all career stages. It is a demanding undertaking - but one that the integrity of AYUSH education, and the professionals who carry it forward, genuinely deserves.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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